



THE PERILS OF JOB BURNOUT

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ABSTRACT

Job related stress is a growing problem these days. There is no such profession today that is stress free. The only difference is in the type and degree of job stress. People always complain of the job stress they experience at their work to their family, friends, colleagues and acquaintances. Long hours of work, heavy work load, role conflict, organisational culture, bad management practices, inadequate work environments, job insecurity, deadlines, lack of proper resources and equipments, lack of required skills, lack of autonomy, lack of proper guidance and over supervision are some of the basic causes of work stress. During the initial stages, job stress is at the manageable level, and people try to bring down their stress levels using various stress relievers like engaging in hobbies, exercise, or quality time with friends and family and soon. But as stress levels get amplified and people get exhausted from suffering from this extreme stress for a long period of time, they get "burned out". Job Burnout is one among the serious issues which is faced by the people engaged in all most all the professions. The present study is descriptive in nature and is intended to present the concept of burnout and its dimensions, the causes and outcomes of burnout.

KEY WORDS: Job Stress, Burnout, Organisational Culture, Role Conflict, Job insecurity.

INTRODUCTION:

Burnout is a type of chronic stress characterised by physical, mental and emotional exhaustion combined with depersonalisation, lower sense of personal accomplishment (Maslach 1982) and disengagement (Maslach and Leiter 1997). Initially for many years, burnout was identified and observed as an occupational hazard and was seen in people – oriented jobs or professions like human services, health care and education. The service oriented professions were such that it required long hours of work and persistent levels of personal and emotional contact with the recipients. The needs of the recipients i.e. clients or student or patients needs were to be given priority rather than one's own needs. More over there many of these professions are moulded by various socio, economic and political factors. The demands for these jobs were high and but the resources were limited. With the passage of time, Burnout has also started to be experienced in other professions also (Maslach 2016). Burnout has become so much prevalent that any person, doing any profession at any level may get victimised by Burnout.

People who are in the initial stages of burnout experience a miserable feeling, finds difficulty in concentrating, becomes less patient, sympathetic and enthusiastic but more irritable, intolerant, exhausted, and cynical and try to disengage themselves from co-workers, clients and family. They no longer feel their work to be challenging and interesting and feels time pressured at work always. They no longer feel that they are being recognised for their work. They become unmotivated and less interested in their work. The very thought of going to work itself disappoints them. Eventually they feel like they have nothing more to contribute more. They feel that they should have chosen some other job as they don't properly fit it in their current work. The major problem with burnout is that people rarely recognise its symptoms. Instead they think that they are going through stress, anxiety or depression. Not only the individual who is burned out, his co-workers also doesn't recognise these symptoms of burnout, and they might think that he is in stress or facing financial problems or relationship issues or even mistake him for personality disorders.

Irrespective of the type of the profession, job burnout significantly affects the productivity and quality of the work provided by the individuals and also affects their physical, mental and emotional wellbeing. They constantly suffer from chronic unhappiness, show signs of irritability, depression, anxiety, mood swings, have suicidal thoughts and also fall prey to alcoholism and drugs. Another harmful effect of Burnout is that it creates a ripple effect that is there is tendency of spreading of burnout to co-workers. Burned employees will also have negative and uncaring attitudes and social interactions towards co-workers, subordinates and even superiors. Some of the vulnerable professions in which the chances of occurrence of job burnout are high are physicians, policemen, teachers, health care workers, social workers, IT sector employees. In the recent time, the burnout has become widespread phenomenon in the corporate jobs, IT jobs and Banking Jobs.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

- To study the concept and dimensions of job burnout.
- To study the causes and outcomes of job burnout.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

- Khattak and et.al. (2011) in their study "Occupational stress and burnout in Pakistan's banking sector" found that the main causes of stress were work-load, long working hours, inadequate salary, lack of time for family and job worries at home and technological problems at work place. Burnout symptoms shown by the respondents were mainly physical symptoms like back pain, extreme tiredness, headache and sleep disturbance. It was found that all the stressors such as the nature of the job, relationship at work, work environment and family work interface are significantly correlated to all types of symptoms of burnouts (Physical, Psychological and Organizational and the prevalence of burnout in the banking sector of Pakistan).
- Halder and Naidu (2012) in their article "A Study on Employee Burnout in IT Sector (With special reference to IT companies in Bangalore District of Karnataka State)" analyses the causes of burnout among the IT employees and found out that heavy work load, long working hours, work pressure, lack of flexibility to adjust their working conditions, work shifts, lack of relaxing time at work and time to spend with family, fear of loss of job, lack of recognition are the main causes of burnout among the IT employees.
- Sahni and Deswal, (2015) conducted a study on "Burnout among Teacher Educators with Respect to Biographical, Psychological and Organizational Variables", and found out that the qualification of the teachers, duration of their teaching experience, academic title, organizational climate, occupational stress, psychological well-being, self-confidence and personality were some of the significant indicators of burnout among the teachers.
- Joanna Moczyłowska (2016) conducted a study on "Organisational reasons of job burnout" to identify the organisational factors which causes the risk of burnout in the work environment. She found that time pressure, pressure of assigned responsibility, expectations from the job, lack of opportunities to develop one's abilities, lack of proper motivational system are some of the causes that could trigger the risk of burnout in the organisation.
- Lo D and et.al (2018) conducted a study on "A systematic review of burnout among doctors in China: a cultural perspective", and found that young doctors and doctors who are working in tertiary hospitals are more prone for experiencing the risk of burnout. The study also found that the burnout among the Chinese doctors he reached at an alarmingly high level.

MATERIALS AND METHODS:

The study is descriptive in nature and intends understand the concept of burnout, its dimensions, causes and outcomes through literature review.

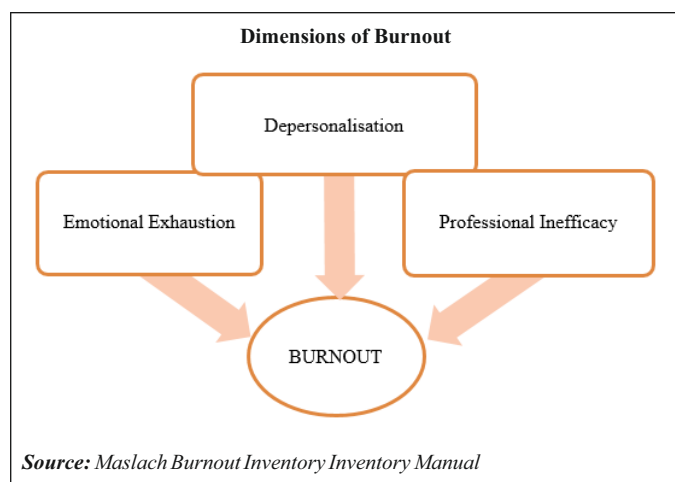
The Concept of Burnout:

Herbert J. Freudenberger, an American psychologist was the first person to describe the symptoms of burnout in 1974 when he observed the signs of burnout in his staff. In 1980, he published a book "Burn Out: The High Cost of High Achievement. What it is and how to survive it" and it became one of the standard references on the phenomenon of burnout. Freudenberger defines burnout to be a "state of mental and physical exhaustion caused by one's professional life". Another important personality who made vital contributions to the research of burnout is Christina Maslach. She is the co-author of the Maslach Burnout

Inventory (MBI). It is a significant and widely used research tool used to measure burnout. She has authored several books on the topic of Burnout such as include *Burnout: The Cost of Caring*, *Professional Burnout: Recent Developments in Theory and Research* (with Wilmar Schaufeli), *The Truth About Burnout* (with Michael Leiter); *Preventing Burnout and Building Engagement: A Complete Program for Organizational Renewal* (with Michael Leiter), and *Banishing Burnout: Six Strategies for Improving Your Relationship with Work* (with Michael Leiter). In addition to this she has also contributed numerous articles on Burnout. Christina Maslach defines Burnout as "a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation, and reduced personal accomplishment that can occur among individuals who do "people-work" of some kind".

Dimensions of Burnout:

Christina Maslach identified that Burnout had three distinguishing dimensions. They are emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation, and reduced personal accomplishment.



Emotional Exhaustion is the feeling of being emotionally depleted or drained in which a people have no longer left to give or contribute to the job, the organisation or even the people they serve. Depersonalisation means the development of cynical, negative attitude and feelings towards ones clients leading to the view that they are somehow deserving of their troubles and problems. The third aspect of job Burnout is the lack of sense of personal accomplishment i.e. feeling little reward from what a person does by the tendency to evaluate himself in negative terms leading to dissatisfaction and unhappiness in his work, thus creating a lack of personal achievement (Maslach and et.al 1997).

The consequences of Burnout are severe to the individuals in particular and also to the clients, the institutions that they serve. The burnout phenomenon leads to the decrease or deterioration in quality of the service provided by the staff. Burnout is can cause serious problems to the organisations with a burned out workforce. Burnout leads to job turnover absenteeism and low morale (Maslach 1997).

Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI):

The Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) is the most widely used tool to measure burnout and is used to assess professional burnout in human service, education, business, and government professions. It is developed to assess the three dimensions of burnout and to develop effective interventions. MBI consists of 22 items relating to job burnout. The original form of the MBI was constructed by Christina Maslach and Susan E. Jackson. The MBI measures three dimensions of burnout - emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment. After the initial publication of the MBI in 1981, new versions of the MBI were developed to fit different groups of people, professions and settings.

Maslach Burnout Inventory Scales:

- Emotional Exhaustion (EE) Scale** - measures feelings of being emotional exhaustion at one's work consists of 9 items. Higher scores indicate that greater amounts burnout is experienced. This scale is applicable in MBI-HSS, MBI-HSS (MP), and MBI-ES versions. On the other hand MBI-GS and MBI-GS (S) use a shorter 5-item version of this scale which is known as called "Exhaustion".
- Depersonalization (DP) Scale** - is used in the MBI-HSS, MBI-HSS (MP) and the MBI-ES versions. It is a 5-item Depersonalization (DP) scale and measures lack of unfeeling or impersonal feeling toward recipients. Higher scores indicate that greater degrees of burnout are experienced.
- Personal Accomplishment (PA) Scale** - is used in the MBI-HSS, MBI-HSS (MP), and MBI-ES versions and it is an 8-item scale which measures feelings of incompetence and lack of success and achievement in one's work. In this scale, lower scores indicate greater burnout.

- Cynicism Scale**: is a 5-item scale and is used in the MBI-GS and MBI-GS (S) versions. It measures an indifference and negative attitude towards work. Higher scores mean greater experienced burnout.
- Professional Efficacy Scale**: This 6-item scale measures feelings of incompetence and lack of professional achievement in one's work. Lower scores means greater experienced burnout. It is used in the MBI-GS and MBI-GS (S) versions.

Versions of MBI:

There are five versions of the MBI: Human Services Survey (MBI-HSS), Human Services Survey for Medical Personnel (MBI-HSS (MP)), Educators Survey (MBI-ES), General Survey (MBI-GS), and General Survey for Students (MBI-GS (S)).

- Maslach Burnout Inventory - Human Services Survey (MBI-HSS)** is the original and most used version of MBI which consists of 22 items and is used for measuring burnout in professions like nurses, physicians, health aides, social workers, health counsellors, therapists, police and so on. The MBI-HSS scales include Emotional Exhaustion, Depersonalization, and Personal Accomplishment.
- Maslach Burnout Inventory - Human Services Survey for Medical Personnel (MBI-HSS (MP))** is a variation of the MBI-HSS which used for measuring burnout among medical personnel. The MBI-HSS (MP) scales include Emotional Exhaustion, Depersonalization, and Personal Accomplishment.
- Maslach Burnout Inventory - Educators Survey (MBI-ES)** is used for measuring burnout of educators such as teachers, administrators, other staff members, and volunteers working in any educational setting. The MBI-ES scales include Emotional Exhaustion, Depersonalization, and Personal Accomplishment.
- Maslach Burnout Inventory - General Survey (MBI-GS)** is used in occupational groups other than human services and education like customer service, maintenance, manufacturing, management, and other professions. The MBI-GS scales are Exhaustion, Cynicism, and Professional Efficacy.
- Maslach Burnout Inventory - General Survey for Students (MBI-GS (S))** is an adapted form of MBI-GS and is designed to assess burnout in college and university students and its scales include Exhaustion, Cynicism, and Professional Efficacy.

Causes of Job Burnout:

Over the period of time various researches have been conducted on the topic of research. The prominent concepts and theories of Burnout have been contributed by Prof.Christina Maslach and her associates Susan .E.Jackson, Michael P. Leiter. In their book "The Truth About Burnout" Christina Maslach and Micheal .P.Leiter emphasizes the root cause of Job Burnout is the Work Environment than the individual concerned. They have identified six areas of work life which can be considered as mismatches between the people and their jobs. If these mismatches are left unattended then, it can lead to burnout. These mismatches are the main causes of Job Burnout They are:

- Work overload** - One of the main causes of burnout in all professions is excessive work overload as it depletes the capacity of the people to cater to the demands of the job. Whenever there is excessive workload, here will be little time to rest and restore from the tiredness. In corporate world, downsizing, layoffs, budget cuts results in excessive workload and they are forced to work more within the time constraints. This results in physical, mental exhaustion and leading to burnout.
- Lack of Control** - If the employees or individuals do not have the freedom and autonomy to influence their decisions, and gain access to resources then they are likely to experience job burnout.
- Insufficient Reward** - It is a well-known fact that if there are no equivalent rewards with respect to increase in the work load, then the chances of burnout are high. Rewards may be in the form of money, recognition, job security and other benefits.
- Break down of community** - If there is lack of trust, support and persistent, unresolved conflict among the members of a workplace, then it could lead to burnout.
- Absence of Fairness** - A work place is said to be fair when there is trust, openness and respect. When people feel they are not being treated with the appropriate respect then, Cynicism, anger and hostility are likely to arise.
- Conflicting values** - Values means the ideals and motivations that originally attracted people to do their job and hence act as the motivational link between the individual and his work place. When there is a values conflict in the values of the individual and the organisation or his concerned profession, employees will find themselves in a dilemma and this can lead to greater

burnout.

Outcomes of Job Burnout:

Burnout problem not only affects the individual alone. Instead it affects the organisation he works and also affects the co-workers and the recipients of his service (like clients or patients or students). Some of the outcomes of Job Burnout are the following:

- Lack of Job satisfaction
- Tendency to withdraw or quit the Job
- Low organizational commitment
- Absenteeism
- Increased labour turnover
- Lower productivity
- Impaired quality of work.

CONCLUSION:

Burnout has become a serious problem these days. The important problem is that the symptoms are mistaken for stress and are avoided without taking proper intervention strategies to prevent burnout. If burnout symptoms are not taken into account, then it may deteriorate the overall well-being of the burned out or burning out individual. Gradually job burnout can spill over to the family and social life of the individual and can destroy the peace and happiness of the individuals. So Burnout symptoms should be identified at the early stages and remedial strategies must be taken in order to combat burnout.

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